of transmission, so that Suetonius, or an intermediate author, has translated it correctly, whereas Pliny, or an intermediate author perhaps, did so incorrectly.  

In conclusion, Pliny's claim that Nero had used to watch gladiatorial games in a smaragdus, by which he seems to mean a mirror made of smaragdus, is best explained as the result of the misreading and mistaken translation of a source which had originally described how Nero had used to watch the games like a spy, not in the manner of a man with a mirror. It is not entirely clear why Pliny should have committed this error, or have failed to detect his error subsequently, if it really was he rather than an intermediate author who did so, but one suspects that two factors may have been at play here. First, Pliny carried out an enormous amount of work very quickly, often in highly unfavourable conditions, such as when he was travelling. Furthermore, he deprived himself of sleep in order to keep up the pace so that he often dozed off during his work. All told, therefore, it is not difficult to believe that he, or the assistant who read to him as he made his notes, could have made a mistake as described above. Next, the reputation of Nero was such that any descriptions of strange behaviour probably did not seem quite so strange when attributed to him. In other words, Pliny was deceived by his basic prejudice against Nero. The same prejudice probably underlies much of the continued modern acceptance that the flamboyant and extravagant Nero could have behaved exactly as alleged.

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23 For other indications that Suetonius derived some of his information concerning Nero from a Greek source, see e.g. D. Woods, 'Nero's Pet Hippopotamus (Suet. Nero 37,2)', Arctos 38 (2004) 219–22.

24 Pliny (the Younger), Ep. 3,5,7–19.

25 On his hostility towards Nero, see e.g. NH 7,45–46; 22,96; 34,45; 35,51; 37,50.